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Viburnum Prunifolium
(Black Haw)

*ITS USES IN THE TREATMENT OF
THE DISEASES OF WOMEN*

BY

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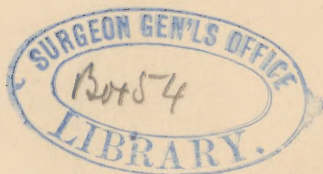
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VIBURNUM PRUNIFOLIUM (BLACK HAW); ITS USES
IN THE TREATMENT OF THE DISEASES
OF WOMEN.

BY EDWARD W. JENKS, M. D.,

Detroit, Mich.

Among the most ornamental of our native shrubs, is a plant belonging to the well-known genus, viburnum, — the same which furnishes our familiar “snow-ball bush,” the “cranberry-tree,” and the “sheep-berry,” — to which botanists have given very appropriately the specific name “prunifolium” (“plum-leaved”).

Its erect, tree-like habit of growth, the regular form and delicate toothing, but more especially the glossy green of its leafage, render it an attractive object throughout the season, and it is conspicuous for beauty when, in the early spring, it puts forth its dense clusters of snowy blossoms. It is indigenous in our southern and western States, where like its northern congener, viburnum lentago, or sheep-berry, it is generally found in dry copses and open woodlands.

Only within a few years has this plant been brought to the notice of the profession as a valuable therapeutic agent, and it has already won for itself a high place in the favorable estimation of the few who have learned its virtues by practical experience.

The portion which is used in medicine, is the bark of the root and the bark of the young shrubs and newly grown twigs, but if procured in the proper season, the bark of the root is to be preferred.

Dr. Phares, of Newtonia, Miss., in 1866, wrote an article on the uses of the viburnum, which was first published in the “Atlanta Medical and Surgical Journal,” and subse-

quently appeared in the "Detroit Review" for December, 1866, the "Boston Medical and Surgical Journal" of October 10, 1867, and other medical journals of the country.

Dr. Phares attached particular value to this remedy for the prevention of abortion. He designated it as a "nervine, antispasmodic tonic, astringent, and diuretic," and adds: "But it is particularly valuable in preventing abortion and miscarriage, whether habitual or otherwise; whether threatened from accidental cause, or criminal drugging. It tones up the system, preventing or removing those harassing nervous symptoms that so often torment and wear down the pregnant woman and disqualify her for the parturient effort. It enables the system to resist the deleterious influence of drugs so often used for the purpose of procuring abortion."

He further alludes, in the same connection, to the habit common among the negro women on some of the southern plantations, of taking a decoction of gossypium, or cotton root, for the purpose of procuring abortion, and says: "Some farmers on whose plantations I have used the medicine, and who have seen much of its effects on negro women who had always managed to miscarry, declare their belief that no woman can possibly abort if compelled to use the viburnum." "This may be claiming too much for it," he adds, "but it has certainly prevented abortion in every case in which I have ordered it for the purpose."

About the time Dr. Phares' article appeared in print, he sent some of the drug to the editors of the "Review," of whom I was one, requesting that its virtues might be tested. My associate, Dr. Andrews, and I used it in a number of cases of threatened abortion, and were so well pleased with its effects, that I have ever since continued to rely upon it as one of the most efficacious remedies we have for this trouble.

Of course no intelligent physician expects, that when an abortion is fairly begun by detachment of the ovum, or when a portion of it is extruded from the uterus, *any* remedy will prevent its ultimate expulsion; the mischief is already done;

the vital connection of the fetus with the mother is destroyed, and no measure can preserve its life.

Dr. Phares, in the paper alluded to, relates a number of cases that illustrate the value of viburnum. I have prescribed it myself in scores of cases, where I should have little hope of success in following the usual routine of treatment, and the results have more than fulfilled my most sanguine expectations. I shall not overstate the fact if I say, that no one remedy or means has proven of equal value in my hands — and I have tried faithfully all the common and time-honored methods of treatment.

Dr. Andrews, of Detroit, with a large family and obstetrical practice, informs me that he considers viburnum an invaluable prophylactic against abortion; he places more reliance upon this than on any other remedy at our command. Several other practitioners have expressed to me their opinion of its value in similar terms.

That viburnum has a powerful influence in preventing threatened abortion, appears, therefore, to be a fact well established. I could myself relate case after case in illustration of its efficacy, but the mass of evidence already accumulated and in the hands of members of our profession, would render this a superfluous task.

I am convinced, however, from conversation with physicians of large obstetrical experience, that the number of those who are practically familiar with the drug is extremely small. I have myself induced a number of my professional acquaintances to give it a trial, recommending it especially in those cases where abortion has become habitual with a woman, and I believe that none who have been persuaded once to test its efficacy, are now willing to omit viburnum from the list of those remedies which they regard as indispensable. It is for the reason that an agent, which has stood the tests of time and repeated experience in the hands of a few, has for some unaccountable reason not become universally known, that it is now brought to the attention of this Society.

Where the habit of aborting has been formed, my mode

of prescribing the viburnum is, to have the patient take from half a teaspoonful to a teaspoonful of the fluid extract four times a day, beginning at least two days before the regular menstrual date, and continuing it not only during the usual period of the catamenial flow, but two days longer than that discharge continues when the woman is not pregnant. Where there are indications that an abortion is imminent, the fluid extract can be administered in teaspoonful doses every two or three hours as long as its use seems to be demanded.

The writer would designate viburnum prunifolium as a uterine sedative, whose action is as pronounced, as is that of ergot in causing uterine contraction. It is not alone in the prevention of abortion that it proves, by virtue of this peculiar sedative action, a most valuable therapeutic agent. It proves equally efficient in the treatment of the sympathetic disorders incident to pregnancy, where a nervine or sedative is demanded, and in a large class of non-puerperal diseases of women. The use of viburnum in this last mentioned class of cases deserves more attention than it has hitherto received, and will occupy the remaining portion of this brief paper.

It could not be otherwise, than that a remedy which is known to exercise such a potent effect upon the pregnant uterus, must be of much service in many affections of the non-pregnant woman.

I was long since led to believe fully, from a series of experiments in test cases, that we possess in viburnum a remedy as valuable in gynecology, as it has proven in obstetrics.

The profession has heard so much of surgical gynecology during the past decade and a half, through the channels of the press, and of the brilliant exploits of eminent men, and by which men are made eminent, that gynecological therapeutics has occupied an insignificant field. There seems to be at the present, very happily, a disposition to place a higher estimate upon constitutional measures in the management of diseases peculiar to women, than has been of late years the fashion among specialists in this department.

The successful gynecologist of to-day is a physician as well as a surgeon, and while believing in the value of many remedies as old as medicine itself, he hails with pleasure any new therapeutic agent, especially when it has already stood the test of a careful, thorough trial, in the hands of those who are at once practical men and scientific physicians.

I am convinced, from an experience in its use extending now over more than six years, both in private and hospital practice, that viburnum is a valuable acquisition to the gynecologist's list of remedies.

I would give as a general statement concerning the uses of viburnum, that it is serviceable in all uterine disorders characterized by loss of blood.

In menorrhagia, or metrorrhagia, depending wholly upon systemic causes, as *e. g.* that in phthisis, organic diseases of the heart, hepatic disorders, anemia, or malarial diseases, it is peculiarly applicable. There is no depressing effect succeeding its administration; on the contrary it is a grateful tonic, serving to stimulate rather than depress. Patients for whom I have prescribed it without informing them for what purpose, have repeatedly spoken of its pleasant, stimulating effects. In the metrorrhagia incident to the menopause with the multiplicity of nervous derangements from which women suffer at this period, viburnum has proven very beneficial. It will modify the hemorrhage caused by uterine growths, but it will not answer to claim for it, in this class of cases, what we expect from ergot. In hemorrhage from such causes, where ergot in full doses is not well tolerated, or where the patient is in a feeble condition, I have been in the habit of combining the two remedies in various proportions, with gratifying results. I have never known painful uterine contraction to be produced by viburnum alone, nor do I think that oxytotic effects can be attributed to it.

Viburnum is serviceable also in certain forms of dysmenorrhea. My attention was first directed to its worth in this affection several years ago, by the remark of a patient for whom I had prescribed it for a profuse menstrual discharge. She said that she had taken the medicine during the men-

strual periods, beginning two or three days before each, and that there was not only a diminution in the quantity of blood, but that menstruation was more nearly painless than it had been before for years. This remark was suggestive, and I have since given viburnum alone such a thorough trial in the various forms of dysmenorrhea, that I have arrived at the following conclusions: In all forms of dysmenorrhea attended with profuse menstruation, viburnum, if administered for several days in advance of the period, as well as during the continuance of the discharge, affords the patient great relief. Where there is with the dysmenorrhea a scanty flow, it does not prove beneficial. If the pain is produced by stenosis, or any mechanical obstruction, it affords only moderate relief. It is not sufficiently sedative, if given alone, to fully relieve the sufferings of spasmodic or neuralgic dysmenorrhea. It is, however, a valuable adjuvant to the sedative and anti-spasmodic remedies, such as *cannabis indica*, camphor, *hyoscyamus*, and *conium*.

In that form of dysmenorrhea with menorrhagia, caused by fibroid growths impinging upon and twisting the uterine canal, viburnum, in combination with ergot, has proven beneficial, and much more so than either remedy if given without the other.

The period of years during which the writer has made almost daily use of viburnum, warrants him in speaking confidently with regard to the results following its use; the method of its physiological and therapeutic action he is content, at present, to leave for others to explain.

It is not claimed for it that it possesses merits that will cause it to supersede or supply the place of many surgical procedures in gynecology, or that its administration is always followed by the desired result.

The fact, however, remains, that it is a valuable acquisition to our list of curative agents, and is deserving of more general use in the treatment of certain affections of women.

